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SF PERUSALS

BEN HUR

by Patrick Barlow

SAMUEL FRENCH

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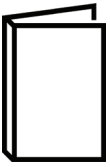

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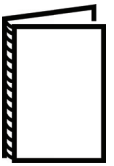

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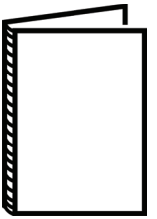

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ABOUT PATRICK BARLOW

Besides his version of Lew Wallace's *Ben Hur*, Patrick's Olivier-nominated adaptation of *A Christmas Carol* has played off-Broadway and London's West End while his 4-person adaptation of *The 39 Steps* has played in over forty countries world-wide, winning Olivier, Helpmann, Moliere and Tony Awards and making Patrick the most performed playwright in America for 2012/13. Most recently his re-writing of John Milton's *Comus* has played to critical acclaim at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre.

Patrick is also celebrated in the UK for his two-man theatre company National Theatre of Brent, whose comedy epics include *Wagner's Ring Cycle*, *The Charles and Diana Story*, *The Messiah*, *The Wonder of Sex*, *The Arts and How They Was Done*, *The Black Hole of Calcutta*, *The Life and Times of the Dalai Lama* and *Zulu!* They have won two Sony Gold Awards, a Premier Ondas Award for Best European Comedy and the New York Festival Gold Award for Best Comedy.

Other screenwriting includes *Van Gogh* (Prix Futura Berlin Film Festival), *Revolution!!* (Best Comedy Jerusalem Film Festival) and the BAFTA-winning *The Young Visiters*. Publications include *Shakespeare: The Truth!* and *The Complete History of the Whole World*. Patrick has also appeared in *Absolutely Fabulous*, *Shakespeare in Love*, *Notting Hill*, *Nanny McPhee* and *Bridget Jones's Diary*. He is currently writing theatre versions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *Dracula*.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This is a play of two worlds. The world of Daniel's play, adapted from Lew Wallace's celebrated nineteenth century tome *Ben Hur* and the world of Daniel's company – The Daniel Veil Theatre Collective who are battling the odds to put the play on. It is the clash of these two worlds, the colossal grandiosity of one and the over-eager paucity of the other, that gives the play its story, its tension and – particularly – its comedy. But – and this is the crucial part – comedy though it certainly is – no one, director, writer, designer, choreographer and particularly actors, should *know* they're in a comedy.

In other words, the whole show, for it to work, must be performed, designed, written, with the utmost seriousness. No "jokes" in other words, nothing signalled. Daniel and his company must perform the *Ben Hur* characters as if they are performing Shakespeare or Aeschylus or Racine. And in full classical style. However loopy and convoluted and pretentious the writing, Daniel (who we must believe wrote it) doesn't *know* it's loopy or convoluted or pretentious. He *believes* he is an artist of classical or biblical stature. The same goes for his portrayal of the title role which, to his mind, is on a par with an Olivier or Cumberbatch. All the actors should have the same inner and intense confidence and deadly certainty of purpose. Partly because they are playing deadly serious actors, but the characters they are playing take themselves deadly seriously too.

The great Buster Keaton said, with comedy, the more seriously the actors, writer, director, take it, the funnier it is. Watch Keaton facing the ludicrous and impossible odds of *The General* or *The Navigator* or *Steamboat Bill Junior*. Or Stan Laurel solemnly putting his whole life into moving a crated piano across a gorge chased by a gorilla in *The Music Box*. Even though these films are funny and Keaton and Laurel do wildly hilarious things, they never even suggest (however beautifully choreographed the routines) that they have any idea they're funny. They are right inside the situation they are playing. They don't show us where to laugh. Life is deadly serious for the silent comedians. They don't know it's funny. So it is for the *Ben Hur* characters and the Daniel Veil characters who live their lives in constant fear of disaster.

If Daniel and his company stumble over lines like: "*There is no other path now but mine own path whereon I now must on I now must now I in I on I tread on,*" the problem for them is that both text and delivery (and memorizing lines) are really beyond their abilities but more importantly that anything that "goes wrong", any little stumble, is just the tiniest hiccough and fazes no one for a moment, so sure is their confidence.

Most important, if something *does* go wrong, the lines go askew, the plume of a helmet gets stuck in a door, a pillar collapses, Crystal and Omar are caught kissing, they *keep going*, even when Daniel nearly doesn't keep going, they keep going because they convince themselves *the audience won't have noticed*. A dangerous misbelief shared by many actors but, however misguided, it can carry them through virtually any stage adversity. In *Ben Hur*, it even carries them through the increasing crisis moments in Act Two, even the end of Act Two when everything threatens to explode. The audience haven't noticed. That's what keeps them going. Even at the end, after nearly losing two actors, after blowing up two chariots, after sins are openly confessed, they reach their triumphant end and resurrection in the full belief nothing was noticed. That they got away with it.

On the point of things going wrong, please note that I have used "sotto" or "hisses" many times as a stage direction or even "very shocked and muted". The point is the painful and emotional arguments that increasingly proliferate between Daniel and his actors are not to be signaled, not to be cheapened for comic effect. The point is these moments – as I've said earlier – must be REAL. Played for real, played for truth. In other words, the question that needs asking is what would REALLY happen if an actor lost his temper, felt sudden deep despair, nearly killed another actor? My point is they would cover it up, hide it and convince themselves the audience was none the wiser.

Even the mis-spellings and mis-pronunciations and convoluted grammar and garbled mock-classical language should be played faithfully and justified by the actors who, not having read the original book, assume that's how it should be. There need be no

jokes, repeat, no jokes for their own sake. Every line in the script must be justified or explained. They should be explored through rehearsal and improvisation. Lines like "unstable chicken", for example. I don't think Daniel wrote this. I think Edgar thinks of it on the spur of the moment but, whatever the reason, it needs exploring properly and playing truthfully. There's no excuse for a funny line that is just there for its own sake. Everything must have a reason and be justified. So if Edgar did just think of the unstable chicken line spontaneously, it shouldn't cause a lot of shocked looks and mugging by the actors. They cover it up, hide it, convince themselves the audience never spotted it and carry on.

A final note. When the Daniel Veil story collides with or invades the Ben Hur story, when they switch between their real characters and their play characters in the same scene, I include stage directions to make this clear, eg:
This is uncomfortably close to the recent situation. But it is a rehearsed scene and they have to continue. Messala laughs cruelly and disappears.

When they flip characters, I will change character names, mid-scene. So JUDAH might address ESTHER, then change to DANIEL then address CRYSTAL etc. I hope this is clear to follow and makes sense of the two stories as they gradually, and slowly but surely nudge, tangle, invade and finally downright explode in each other's worlds. But don't worry.

The audience won't even notice.

Patrick Barlow – November 2016

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A Christmas Carol

The 39 Steps

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BEN HUR was first presented at the Watermill Theatre, in association with Fiery Angel, in 2012 and directed by Sean Foley and Patrick Barlow. This latest version was presented at the Tricycle Theatre, in association with Fiery Angel and Fiery Dragons, in 2015 with the following cast and creative team:

DANIEL/JUDAH BEN HUR – John Hopkins

OMAR/MESSALA/JESUS – Ben Jones

CRYSTAL/TIRZAH/ESTHER/MARY– Alix Dunmore

EDGAR/SARAH/QUINTUS ARRIUS – Richard Durden

Director – Tim Carroll
Designer – Michael Taylor
Lighting Designer – Mark Doubleday
Sound Designers – Ben & Max Ringham
Movement Director – Siân Williams
Costume Supervisor – Catherine Kodicek
Backstage Crew – Simon Sinfield, Elizabeth Patrick, Caitlin O'Reilly, Jessica Bishop and Kate Riedler

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Indhu Rubasingham, Bridget Kalloushi, Trish McElhill, Jennifer Bakst and Shaz McGee at the Tricycle Theatre.
My agent Jane Villiers and her team at Sayle Screen.
Thanks also to Tamara Harvey, John Manning and Briony Barnett and epic thanks to my spectacular assistant Phoebe Eclair-Powell.

FOR
SAM JOE NELL
who are always there, always get the point and never cease to wonder

CHARACTERS

DANIEL VEIL – 30
JUDAH BEN HUR –30
MELCHIOR – 70-100
NUBIAN DANCER – 18

CRYSTAL SINGER – 25
MARY – 20-50
TIRZAH – 16
ESTHER – 24
ANCIENT SLAVE – 100
NUBIAN DANCER 2 – 18
CATALINYA – 20
NABOTH - 16
MRS PILATE – 40

OMAR LORD – 30
MESSALA – 30
JESUS – 30
CASPAR – 70-100
ARCHANGEL GABRIEL – 30
GALLEY CAPTAIN – 50
ROMAN CAPTAIN – 30
GALLEY SLAVE 3 – 20
NUBIAN DANCER 3 – 18
VALENTINYO – 20

EDGAR T CHESTERFIELD – 70
BALTHASAR – 70-100
SARAH – 60
CENTURION/SLAVE-DRIVER – 50
QUINTUS ARRIUS – 60-70
PONTIUS PILATE – 60-70

SETTING

Ancient Rome, Jerusalem, Syrian Desert, Nazareth, Mediterranean Sea.

TIME: AD 1-30 and Modern Day

The set should be practical for the needs of the production but should reflect Daniel Veil's desire to recreate as authentic a representation of Jerusalem and Rome in the 1st century AD as is possible within his somewhat limited means.

Any music used should be nothing short of epic in nature.

As per the author's note on the nature of this piece – all set, props, musical interludes etc must be used and played entirely seriously.

ACT ONE

1 Auditorium.

Music: *overture.*

DANIEL *(voiceover)* Good evening and welcome to the Tricycle Theatre and tonight's play. The world premiere of Ben Hur – A Tale of the Christ, presented by the Daniel Veil Theatre Collective, and adapted, directed, designed and choreographed by Daniel Veil. But before we begin tonight's performance please be certain to turn off all mobile telephones and any photographic equipment. Thank you. And now – to introduce tonight's performance – please welcome myself. Daniel Veil.

Enter **DANIEL.**

Thank you. Thank you so much. And welcome to Ben Hur – A Tale of the Christ. Adapted by myself from the great American novel written in 1880 by the American general and American Civil War general General Lewis or Lew Wallace. Tonight we will be recreating for you every scene of his entire nine-hundred-page novel, including an authentic Roman sea battle, a lifelike reconstruction of ancient Rome and of course the world-famous and iconic chariot race. But not only that. I am also thrilled to announce that for the first time in the history of epic theatre, every one of the seventy thousand historically accurate and psychologically complex characters of Ben Hur – A Tale of the Christ – will be played by a cast of four. Thank you. And featuring –

Music.

Enter **OMAR.**

No no Omar!

Exit **OMAR.**

– myself Daniel Veil in the title – or leading – role of Ben Hur.

Music.

Thank you. Thank you so much. Thank you. So now lets meet the Daniel Veil Theatre Collective. And – first but by no means least – an up-and-coming young actor and highly popular, so I gather, with Welsh daytime TV audiences and playing the villain Messala – Omar Lord.

Music.

Enter **OMAR.** *He bows.*

Secondly – taking on many of the crucial older and more – older roles, renowned Shakespearean actor and Radio Four favourite – he has come out of retirement especially for us and very much against his doctor's orders – Edgar T Chesterfield.

Music.

Enter **EDGAR.** *He bows.*

And finally – it is my truly enormous pleasure to introduce a very special and may I say unique young talent. She is, in my personal opinion, one of the brightest, not to say hottest, young stars of tomorrow. As soon as I met her I knew I had no option but to cast her as my captivating young lover Esther – Crystal Singer.

Music.

Enter **CRYSTAL.** *She bows.*

As a collective there's not much we don't know about each other and I'm sure it's no secret that I've become rather – fond of Crystal during rehearsal. And – well – I have reason

to believe the feeling might be mutual. But who knows? Let's just say – watch this space.

He kisses her hand. **CRYSTAL** *smiles awkwardly.*

Thank you Crystal. And the Daniel Veil Theatre Collective. Thank you so much. But just before we begin, I'd like to just say that tonight's show is a very special show for me personally because a certain member of my family is in tonight. At least I hope so.

Looks shyly up at the gallery.

I'll say no more for the moment. So – on with the show! The world premiere performance of Ben Hur – A Tale of the Christ by General Lew Wallace adapted by Daniel Veil. But first –

Music.

– before we raise the curtain, we are now going to attempt something never before ever attempted in this or, I believe, any other theatre. As we part the veils of history –

The mists of time fill the stage. Exit **OMAR**, **CRYSTAL** *and* **EDGAR**. *They disappear through the smoke.* **EDGAR** *gets lost but is guided out by* **CRYSTAL**.

– and witness the actual summoning up of General Lew himself, who, albeit long deceased, returneth now in person, to begin our tale.

Music.

Exit **DANIEL** *through the smoke.*

Enter **EDGAR** *as* **GENERAL LEW**. *He has only just got into an American Civil War uniform and Abe Lincoln beard. He carries a leather-bound book.*

GENERAL LEW Well howdy there. And yes indeed it is myself. General Lewis or Lew Wallace himself, who findeth himself

transported through the mists of time to introduce this, dare I humbly say, mighty work of mine, as was just mentioned. But who is this Ben Hur? And why a tale of the Christ? And – more to the point – how come a nineteenth century American Civil War American general, who never once in his life hadst opened a single book, didst write a nine hundred and forty-eight-page novel set in the distant epoch of ancient Roman times, about which he knoweth precisely nothing? How didst all this thing come to pass, how was this endless book writ I hear you cry? Sadly the answer to that great mystery is still unknown – even to myself. And so now without let or hindrance or just impediment let us now begin our mighty endless tale.

He opens the book.

Music: *mystic cymbal clash.*

The Story of Ben Hur. A Tale of the Christ. By me. Chapter one. Page –

He turns several pages.

– page – page – page – page – one.

Music.

And lo. One ancient night long ago on an ancient road, worn by the winds of time, in the great Syrian desert of El-Jebel-akh-Lebel, three travellers did happenstance to meet. All three from the – four corners of the earth doth come – majestically bestridetheth are they upon their proud vessels. Their ships of the desert.

Sound effects: camel bark.

Searching, ever searching for what they know not what they what of. I leave thee now in their ancient company.

GENERAL LEW *exits through the mists of time. He coughs a bit.*

Music *builds.*

2 Syrian Crossroads. Night.

Enter on camels, **DANIEL** *as* **MELCHIOR**, **OMAR** *as* **CASPAR**, *doing a majestic choreographed camel-sway. They gaze intently up into the night sky. They see each other and stop.*

Manoeuver their camels to face each other. They bow.

CASPAR All hail o stranger.

MELCHIOR All hail also o stranger.

Sound effects: camel bark.

CASPAR But see. Another stranger.

They look offstage, they wait.

Sound effects: camel barks.

MELCHIOR See where he cometh!

CASPAR Yes!

MELCHIOR Nearly here.

Sound effects: camel barks.

Enter **EDGAR** *as* **BALTHASAR**. *A little flustered as he has only just got out of his* **GENERAL LEW** *costume. He manoeuvers his camel to face the others. They all bow.*

BALTHASAR All hail o strangers!

CASPAR Hail!

MELCHIOR Hail!

BALTHASAR Tell me strangers, wouldst thou be – wise men?

MELCHIOR A wise man am I.

CASPAR And I a wise man also.

BALTHASAR In that case we are – three wise men!

Sound effects: three camels bark.

MELCHIOR Melchior am I.

CASPAR I Caspar am.

BALTHASAR And I am Balthasar am.

MELCHIOR But what strange coincidence is this that we three kings of Orient are met here? All searching – for a sign!

CASPAR Will we ever find it?

BALTHASAR Or has our journey proved in vain?

Music.

MELCHIOR But list! What is that?

He looks up.

Look! Look!

They all look at him.

Not at me! There! Look up there!

They all look up. Gasp!

Light effects: a bright light shines down.

CASPAR 'Tis a star!

MELCHIOR Star of wonder!

CASPAR Star of light!

BALTHASAR Like a tiger in the night!

MELCHIOR But see! See where it shineth! Upon a simple human humble stable there! Ride brethren ride!

The stable comes on. The **WISE MEN** *gallop on the spot. The stable squeaks into position.*

Look! Here it is.

CASPAR Further than we thought.

They stop galloping. Look at the stable.

BALTHASAR Let us step forth and open this simple human humble simple stumble human…dumbledor!

The three **WISE MEN** *open the stable. Reveal* **MARY** *in her blue robe, holding the new-born baby.*

MELCHIOR But look!

Sound effects: baby cry.

CASPAR A little baby! All in swaddling is he swaddled! Surely a little tiny little baby cannot be the end of all our searching.

MARY Hello.

BALTHASAR Hello.

MELCHIOR Hello.

BALTHASAR Hello.

CASPAR But what ist this tiny little tiny baby might we ask?

MARY A most wondrous tiny baby methinks. But then perhaps I would say that. Being his mother.

She chuckles ruefully. The **WISE MEN** *chuckle too.*

Even so, wonders already hath he performed in his tiny tiny life. Why e'en now – albeit newly born, his little new-born eye didst fall upon a little lame chicken in the stable.

BALTHASAR An un-stable chicken.

MARY Indeed. And immediately didst stretch forth his little tiny hand and – lo! He healed him.

BALTHASAR Healed the chicken?!

The **WISE MEN** *gasp in amazement.*

MELCHIOR Madame –

Sound effects: baby cry.

Madame – we hast searchest day and night to bring gifts unto your little tiny little tiny baby. For why we know not or for what purpose who canst tell, but they are thine.

The **WISE MEN** *awkwardly manoeuvre their camels into a kneeling position and present their gifts. They are wrapped up like Christmas presents. One might be a little Christmas stocking.*

MARY Thank you o three wise men.

BALTHASAR No dear lady. Unblemished as the snow, as spotless as – as the lark. Thank YOU.

The **WISE MEN** *pay homage to the baby.* **OMAR** *surreptitiously goes behind the stable.*

Music.

MELCHIOR *(suddenly anxious)* What is that?

BALTHASAR What?

MELCHIOR Canst not hear it?

BALTHASAR Yes! What?

MELCHIOR Someone is here. Some other presence.

BALTHASAR We've given our presents.

MELCHIOR No. NO! But look!

OMAR *appears as the* **ARCHANGEL GABRIEL.** *With white unwieldy wings. The* **WISE MEN** *and* **MARY** *gasp, shielding their eyes.*

Aggghh! Art thou – an angel?

GABRIEL AN ARCHANGEL! Behold!

WISE MEN Yes?

GABRIEL You must leave this place!

BALTHASAR But we only just got here.

GABRIEL No no no! Listen! Listen! Dost not hear THAT?!

Sound effects: hurricane wind. Military sounds. Helicopters. Marching men.

Soldiers! Soldiers in the night! Coming for the baby! Take flight! Take flight! Quick! Take the baby from the stable. Do not hang about! The wicked of the earth doth rise! Hide the baby! Hide the baby from the men who would kill him!

Music: *builds.*

WISE MEN *and* **MARY** *perform a choreographed escaping from the soldiers routine. Smoke fills the stage. The* **WISE MEN** *escape one way,* **MARY** *and the baby escape the other. She waves goodbye and thank you to the* **WISE MEN**. *They disappear into the smoke.* **OMAR**, *still in his wings, is left to heft off the stable. This is easier said than done.*

Music.

Enter **GENERAL LEW**. *The smoke swirls round him.*

GENERAL LEW And so we turn to the next chapter of this mighty tome and lo! Time hath fleeted by a further twenty-five years. But what world now is it that awaits us? Doth Herod the king still rule? Nay, for Herod the king is gone and a new tyrant come. A tyrant without mercy who rules the whole world. Dread Caesar emperor of the Romans. But 'tis not the din of his mighty Roman capital of Rome that doth greet our senses for the next chapter of our tale but the capital of his most mutinous province of Judea. The capital named – Jerusalem!

Sound effects: the distant roar of Jerusalem. People shouting, donkeys, bicycles, car horns, snatches of cafe music. A distant muezzin.

The Jerusalem dawn skyline appears. Minarets and domes. One of the minarets sways. **DANIEL** *nips on and steadies it.*

That once-proud and historic city now crushed and enchained, her bitter weeping people enslaved in their teeming alleyways and back streets by their heartless Roman overlords who know not the name of peace or forgiveness. But not amidst those teeming alleyways and back streets doth our story now continue, but in a mighty and resplendent house. Built high above that weeping people and oblivious to their pain. The name of that mighty house, the House of Hur. Home of the new prince of Hur, Judah Ben Hur.

Music.

3 House of Hur. Day.

TIRZAH BEN HUR *runs on.* **JUDAH***'s sister. Fifteen years old.*

TIRZAH Mother! Mother! Mother! Mother!

SARA BEN HUR *enters. Played by* **EDGAR**. *A Jewish matron in robe and headdress.*

SARA What is it daughter? What is it?

TIRZAH Oh Mother Mother! I can barely believe it Mother!

Falls into her mother's arms.

HE is coming home! Messala! Messala!

Music.

After five whole years! Oh will he come soon do you think?

She runs to the parapet. Leans over.

Sound effects: the roar of Jerusalem.

SARA Tirzah Tirzah!

TIRZAH *runs back.*

Sound effects: cuts.

TIRZAH Yes Mother?

SARA Do be careful my daughter! Do remember the dangerously loose terracotta tile on the ancient ornamental parapet!

TIRZAH Sorry Mother! But o Mother dost think Messala who lived with us for so many years as son and brother will he have changed do you think? After five whole years in the Roman army?

SARA Changed my darling? No no I'm –

Her brow furrows with anxiety.

– sure he wont!

TIRZAH But mother will he – *(gasps!)* I CAN – I CAN BARELY SAY IT! Will he – propose do you suppose?

SARA *(gasps!)* Propose?! Who knows? Darling daughter don't get carried away I beg of thee! He is after all your brother my darling!

TIRZAH But only my adopted brother Mother! Thou didst not bear him in thine womb!

SARA *(gasps with shock)* Tirzah! Contain thy language I beg of thee!

TIRZAH O Mother forgive me for mine outspoken speaking! But let us not forget how Messala didst comest amongst us. How my father, alas no more, the enormously powerful, famously rich and mighty merchant Hur, Obadiah Hur, didst spottest him in the street one day, a starving little beggar boy with nothing to call his own, not even tiny shoes upon his tiny starving feet, and taking pity upon him, as was his wont, bringest him unto our homely home the House of Hur to live with us and be childhood companion unto me and my brother –

Takes a breath.

– Judah. Judah Ben Hur.

Music.

O Mother Mother! Do you remember Mother? How they would laugh and play? And race their little homemade wooden chariots? Messala and Judah! What was it they cried out? Down Eros! Up Mars! What happy times were they, were they not Mother? O Mother Mother will we have happy times again?

Music. *cuts.*

SARA Sorry my darling. I was miles away. But – talking of Judah –

TIRZAH Yes?

SARA Where is Judah?

TIRZAH Judah? Why I believe he is in the gumnasium Mother. Working out.

SARA Working out what?

TIRZAH *(she laughs)* Oh Mother! Tis a modern term oft uséd by the youth. It means –

***Music**: trumpet call.*

But – *(gasps!)* listen! Is that not – *(gasps!)* the tribune's trumpet?

TIRZAH *runs to the parapet. Leans over excitedly. Gasps!*

Sound effects: roar of Jerusalem etc.

SARA Tirzah Tirzah!

TIRZAH *runs back.*

Sound effects: cuts.

TIRZAH Tis he Mother tis he!

SARA What did I just tell you about that dangerously loose ornamental tile on the exotic ornamental terracotta parapet?!

TIRZAH But I saw him Mother! You should see his enormous helmet! I feel quite faint!

SARA I've asked Judah to see to that parapet but does he do anything!? Plainly not! He spends his days in the gumnasium. Buggering up. Your –

TIRZAH Buffing up.

SARA Buffing up. Your father would have fixed that tile! He was a true man. As I am forced to remind your brother on a more or less daily basis!

TIRZAH Mother? Forgive me for saying so Mother but might it not be somewhat psychologically ill-advised to compare a young man negatively with his father on a more or less daily basis? Might it not lead to certain complicated Oedipal issues in later life?

SARA I'm afraid that's all rather Greek to me my darling.

Sound: knocking on door.

(Tizrah and Sarah freeze) Ahhh!

TIRZAH Tis he mother! Tis he! At the front door!

SARA Quick! Where is Esther?

TIRZAH Esther?

SARA Esther. Our beautiful dutiful traditional Jewish serving girl. But also our friend in many respects. Has she finished preparing the lunch she was preparing?

Sound: knocking on door.

Tell her to hurry daughter hurry!

TIRZAH *(calls off)* Esther Esther! Hurry with the lunch!

SARA Quickly!

TIRZAH *(very fast)* Esther Esther! Hurry with the lunch!

TIRZAH *exits.*

ESTHER *(offstage)* Coming mistress!

TIRZAH *re-enters.*

TIRZAH She says it's coming.

SARA Has she done the falafels?

TIRZAH *exits.*

TIRZAH *(offstage)* Have you done the falafels?

ESTHER *(offstage)* Yes.

TIRZAH *re-enters.*

TIRZAH Yes.

***Music**: trumpet call.*

The door opens dramatically. **MESSALA** *stands there in breastplate and helmet.* **TIRZAH** *gasps! With painful memory and sudden burgeoning adolescent desire.*

***Music**:*

MESSALA Tirzah.

TIRZAH Messala.

MESSALA You have – grown.

TIRZAH Have I?

MESSALA So fair thou wast, now fairer now thou art than thou wast when thou wert.

Awkward moment.

TIRZAH Thank you.

MESSALA *(bashes breastplate)* Lady Hur.

SARA Messala, no formalities I beg of thee. Call me – Mother!

MESSALA Mother indeed! How could I forget? And – *(looks around emotionally)* the House of Hur! How could I forget that either? Also? Anyway –

TIRZAH 'Tis still your home Messala.

MESSALA Thank you. I was sorry to hear about – Lord Hur.

SARA Obadiah.

MESSALA Was he?

SARA His name.

MESSALA Of course.

SARA Twas was a peaceful end.

MESSALA Most glad am I to hear it. So now there is a new lord here Hur now? New Hur lord here now?

SARA Sorry?

MESSALA A new Hur here lord new here Hur now lord near here –

SARA *(no idea)* Indeed.

MESSALA So – will the new Lord Hur here be – joining us?

Pause.

VOICE Yes Messala. He will.

MESSALA, TIRZAH, SARA *turn.* **JUDAH BEN HUR** *appears in a shaft of light. They all gasp! at his charisma.*

Music:

MESSALA Judah Ben Hur

JUDAH Messala Sextus Messala.

MESSALA It has been a long time Judah.

JUDAH It certainly has Messala. How are you?

MESSALA Not bad – thank you. And you?

JUDAH I must not grumble.

MESSALA I am glad to hear it.

JUDAH Likewise.

Awkward moment. **TIRZAH** *can contain herself no longer.*

TIRZAH O do you remember? Do you? Racing in your little homemade wooden chariots? Getting under Mother's feet? You two boys!

They all laugh at the memory.

MESSALA How could we forget Tirzah?

TIRZAH *(gazing at* **MESSALA***)* I didn't forget.

A noticeable look between **CRYSTAL** *and* **OMAR. DANIEL** *doesn't notice.*

MESSALA Down Eros!

JUDAH Up Mars!

They fall into each other's arms. They pull away laughing loudly. They fall into each other's arms again, but this time **TIRZAH** *joins them.*

TIRZAH Down Eros!

Another moment between **CRYSTAL** *and* **OMAR**. *They turn away awkwardly.* **OMAR** *becomes* **MESSALA** *again and hugs* **JUDAH**.

MESSALA Up Mars!

JUDAH *looks at* **MESSALA** *and pulls away. They all laugh again even louder before disentangling themselves.*

So anyway Judah how is this wretched country of yours while I've been away? Still the same?

He marches to the parapet. Looks down into the street.

Sound effects: roar of Jerusalem etc.

He nearly leans on the parapet, then marches back.

Sound effects: cuts.

Still the most miserable mutinous province in the empire? With all its riots and rebellions and angels and prophesies and wise men and carpenters and all that miracle-mongering mumbo jumbo! Or has this miserable people of yours finally seen the light?!

JUDAH Light?

MESSALA The light of the world Judah! The light of Rome!

Gives the imperial salute.

Hail Caesar! Oh Judah Judah!

JUDAH What?

MESSALA Just think!

JUDAH What?

MESSALA What we can do!

JUDAH Who?

MESSALA You and me of course! When I've moved back in.

TIRZAH Oh yes! Will you?! Can he Mother?!

MESSALA Slightly bigger room than before I think.

Laughs.

TIRZAH *(laughs)* Yes yes! A much bigger room! He can, can't he Mother?

SARA Um – but of course. Lovely!

MESSALA Judah?

JUDAH Um – lovely!

MESSALA You don't seem very sure.

JUDAH Of course! Ha ha ha! Of course I'm sure!

MESSALA Ha ha ha! Of course you are! The House of Hur can be our home again!

JUDAH Yes!

TIRZAH *YES!*

MESSALA And *(emphatically)* My Headquarters!

JUDAH Your Headquarters?

MESSALA *(more emphatically)* My Headquarters! The new headquarters of the personal tribune to the new Roman governor of Jerusalem.

JUDAH New head – personal – Roman – um –

MESSALA Must I spell it out as if to a child?! Ha ha ha! The new personal tribune to the new Roman governor of Jerusalem? Is – ME!

JUDAH, **TIRZAH** and **SARA** YOU?!

MESSALA O Judah Judah Judah! Everything is changed now! Remember how we lived in this house as brothers! As youths! But now we are no longer youths! We have put away our youthful things! Now we have a greater purpose! We shall live in this house again!

TIRZAH Yes!

MESSALA But this time – as servants of Rome! And together we shall keep an eye – and spy – on this rebellious mutinous race of yours!

JUDAH Spy? I?

As it dawns.

I SPY?!

MESSALA While all the time living as Romans live! The Roman sandal clad upon our feet, eating decadent Roman dinners by the light of a thousand Roman candles, bathing in the imperial baths with the finest Imperial Leather.

JUDAH *pulls away.*

Music:

O Judah Judah! Let not thy fevered brow be so besmited with anxiety after so tender and brief a reunion! Hast all thy childhood memories departed thee so suddenly? Hast thou forgotten what we were to one another?

JUDAH I – I – I –

An awkward moment. **TIRZAH** *looks bewildered.*

SARA Tirzah my darling?

TIRZAH Yes Mother?

SARA Why not put on your lovely new pretty frock to show Messala?

TIRZAH My lovely new pretty lovely frock? Shall I Messala?

MESSALA Why not?

SARA Then lunch I think.

MESSALA Lunch! Splendid!

SARA Tell Esther to hurry with the lunch while you're fetching the frock.

TIRZAH Certainly Mother.

MESSALA And most fetching will she look in my opinion.

This line is not in **DANIEL***'s play.* **OMAR** *had it up his sleeve and slipped it in. Everyone is thrown.*

TIRZAH Right. Shan't – be long Messala.

MESSALA Okay.

Another awkward moment. Possibly a tiny look between **DANIEL** *and* **OMAR.** **TIRZAH** *skips out.*

TIRZAH *(offstage)* Esther Esther?!

ESTHER *(offstage)* Yes young mistress?

TIRZAH *(offstage)* Hurry hurry with the lunch!

ESTHER *(offstage)* Lunch young mistress? Coming right up young mistress.

Sound effects: loud clattering of pots and pans. This goes on quite a long time.

DANIEL, OMAR *and* **EDGAR** *wait while the clattering goes on. The clattering stops and* **CRYSTAL** *enters as* **ESTHER.** **ESTHER** *is a beautiful servant girl. She carries an exotic tray of food.*

Music:

WAIT, THERE'S MORE!

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